TAC Meeting Notes January 13, 2009 6:00 p.m.



Present: Laila Barr; Dan Chavre; Ray Day, Jr.; Kathy Dunn (provisional)*; Dave Elliott, chair; Kumiko Huff (provisional)*; Jane Kuechle (provisional)*; Ed Miller; Carla Saulter, vice-chair; Bria Schlottman (provisional)*; Tina Shereen; Roger Thordarson

Excused: Miranda Leidich; Joan Michaels

Staff: Barbara de Michele, Community Relations Planner; Jim O'Rourke, Manager of Metro Operations

Elliott opened the meeting at 6:00 p.m.

Metro's Snow Challenges

O'Rourke reported on the extraordinary challenges facing Metro during a series of December snow events which lasted approximately two weeks. Metro drivers are trained on the "safety, service, schedule" model. In the area of safety, Metro performed very well with only two accidents and one broken bone reported throughout the entire two week period. "The bad news," said O'Rourke, was in the areas of service and schedule. Some of the issues he outlined:

- Under ordinary circumstances, Metro has 1200 buses on the road at any given time. All communications from these buses come through four call center operators, who are each handling about 300 drivers. During the snow events, the system jammed.
- Metro has only five tow trucks. One of the tow trucks was out of commission during the snowfall.
- Emergency plans specify that mechanics are put on 12-hour shifts during an emergency. However, during a snow event, mechanics spend a great deal of time with such things as chaining, and are unable to complete regular maintenance tasks.
- Metro has 2800 drivers. O'Rourke estimates that about 500 of them had no previous snow experience, reflecting the number of new hires since the last major snow event in the Puget Sound area.
- With a breakdown in communications and with many inexperienced drivers, decisions about whether or not to follow routes were left to individual drivers on the scene. Metro had no way to capture information about the hundreds of reroutes that were occurring, leaving many passengers at bus stops without service.
- December is a very heavy month for Metro under ordinary circumstances, given the number of family gatherings, people coming in from out of town, and general tourism and public events.
- During heavy snow, articulated buses jackknife. Over the two-week period, Metro lost coach types that could not handle the heavy snow conditions. Trolley buses, for example, are not able to go around stalled vehicles, and therefore become stalled themselves. The fleet was gradually reduced to 500 buses, or less than half of the fleet.

^{*}Note: Provisional members have been appointed by the Executive, and their nominations are supported by their individual Councilmembers, but they have not yet been confirmed by the whole Council.



- Coordination with City of Seattle snow removal teams was poor. The city had difficulty clearing the streets and keeping them clear. In addition, snow plows did not create turnarounds for buses, which then got stuck at the end of plowed streets.
- The crises demonstrated the importance of Metro's communications systems. In two weeks, the Customer Information Office received 1.4 million contacts via the website or phone. Information was hard to find and rarely in real time. However, Metro was pleased with the telecommuting function of its Customer Information Office. CIO staff members were able to handle incoming calls and e-mails from home.
- In previous snow events, the suburbs have been most affected. In this case, the suburbs were less impacted, while heavy snow fell and remained in Seattle. Buses came into Seattle from the suburbs but were then unable to get to their final destinations.
- In addition to the City of Seattle, Metro must deal with snow efforts in 39 other jurisdictions and, again, coordination was often non-existent.
- Finally, although Metro has emergency plans in place that assume loss of up to 15% of the fleet, it does not have plans for the level of fleet failures experienced during this snow event.

O'Rourke said that the need for improved emergency plans is clear to all parties and already in development. The City of Seattle has agreed to a Metro staff presence in their Emergency Operations Center during the next crisis. In 2010, Metro will get a much-improved Call Center communications system with GPS capability. The need to meet new and greater customer information expectations through the website and other electronic media is overwhelmingly clear. The need to deploy employees strategically to deal with critical needs is another "lesson learned" through this event.

TAC members provided the following comments and suggestions:

- We very much appreciate your report. It is refreshing to have someone come here and tell us how you plan to fix the problems.
- Is there a way the public can help to determine which roads you can continue to use? People are out there with cell phone cameras, instant messaging and twitter. [O'Rourke: It's a great idea and we need to figure out how to channel and use all the information coming in].
- Community emergency response teams would be excited to get involved in this effort.
- How can we use the police departments? They are also out there and seeing the situation on the ground.
- This group has long advocated for an improved website. We hope that you'll join us in that effort.
- Will the emergency plans that you are developing address the different nature of, say, a snowstorm and an earthquake? Although they are both emergencies, the impacts on the physical environment are much different.



- There were people waiting at a bus stop for a long time, who then decided to walk. Sure enough, the bus would come along while they were between stops. Does Metro have a policy for these situations?
- You need a much better way to give real-time information to the bus drivers. They can help inform the passengers if they know what's happening. In one instance, there was a shuttle service only a couple of blocks away, but drivers weren't directing their passengers to it.
- During a snow crisis you should be able to find the link to the snow routes right on the Metro homepage, or even on the King County home page. You shouldn't have to search for it.
- Metro's bus drivers got some great publicity out of this event. People generally thought the drivers were doing a great job, even a heroic job. There were some great stories on TV.
- You should try to enlist businesses in your communications efforts. At Childrens' Hospital, we have an employee listserve. If we had the information, we'd be glad to pass it along to our employees. There are lots of networks out there that would be happy to help out in an emergency.
- Could you use the TV channels the way the school districts used them? There was a constantly updated banner at the bottom of the screen giving information for each district. How about another banner giving information on each route? Or, if not the individual route, you could provide information on each arterial served by transit.
- In Seattle, property owners are not required to clean the sidewalks. People had no idea about how to get around, and getting to bus stops was extremely hazardous. Does Metro plan to work with the City of Seattle to improve this situation, either through education or ordinance?
- During an emergency, you could put something on the website about "how to catch a bus in a snowstorm," with warnings and tips. It could be a "how to be prepared" link to information.
- Even though the bus drivers don't have snow experience, is there a way to have them learn how to drive in snow through a simulator?

TAC Retreat

Members reviewed a draft retreat agenda and approved it by consensus. It was noted that General Manager Kevin Desmond will join the group for lunch, and wants to address them regarding Metro's budget response. Members asked that the following questions be sent to Desmond in advance of the meeting:

- How are we progressing on advertising efforts, and what plans do you have for this issue in 2009?
- What is happening with the wrapped buses issue in 2009?
- What is the most important issue for the TAC to tackle in 2009?
- How can the TAC most help Metro in 2009?



The group also requested that de Michele e-mail a report on the 2008 work plan in advance of the meeting.

CAC Conference

De Michele reviewed a draft plan for the CAC conference tentatively scheduled for September 25, 2009. At the end of the discussion Miller moved, Saulter seconded that the TAC form a subcommittee to work on the CAC Conference with de Michele. Passed unanimously. Kuechle, Schlottman and Day volunteered for the subcommittee.

Committee Business

- De Michele reported that she continues to wait for confirmation on a last candidate for the Transit Advisory Committee.
- A proposed letter of advice on wrapped bus advertising will be tabled until after the TAC's discussion with General Manager Kevin Desmond at the TAC retreat.
- Miller, Ray and Barr reported on their respective Sounding Boards and Advisory Panel.
- Miller and Day volunteered to attend the Regional Transit Committee meeting on January 21.

Elliott adjourned the meeting at 8:00 p.m.